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ABSTRACT

This report examines international research and current educational publications about teacher workload and related stress. Workload issues have been a concern for Canadian teachers and teacher unions during recent years, with British Columbia's teachers reporting the highest stress levels nationwide. Teachers must juggle diverse, intense types of interactions and respond to requests by colleagues, administrators, parents, and community members. Teachers report experiencing very high stress related to reporting practices and issues. International studies show that teachers' work intensification mirrors societal trends toward overwork. Site-based management has led to increased teacher workload. Imposed and centralized system accountability, lack of professional autonomy, relentlessly imposed change, constant media criticism, reduced resources, and moderate pay all relate to teacher stress. Some studies indicate that there are gender-based differences in teacher stress. The effects of teacher stress include declining job satisfaction, reduced ability to meet students' needs, significant incidences of psychological disorders leading to increased absenteeism, and high levels of claims for stress-related disability. Stress appears to be a factor in teachers leaving the profession in many countries. Collective bargaining is an obvious route to addressing teacher workload, and British research indicates that action can be taken once the effects of stress-inducing workloads are understood. (Contains 28 references.) (SM)

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Section III
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Teacher workload and stress: An international perspective on human costs and systemic failure

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September 2001

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"Work should not consume people. Teachers who are exhausted, frazzled and demoralized by their work are not effective or creative in the classroom. And exhaustion further undermines the social bonds in schools. When teachers do not have the energy to interact effectively with each other, with administrators and with students, serious problems emerge. And the workload issue will not go away soon…. If the increased workload remains, I predict that schools will progressively become less healthy places. And everyone will be affected — teachers, support staff, students and parents. That cannot be good news."

Kevin Reed, Ontario teacher

"Workload increase leaves teachers exhausted, demoralized," *The Kingston Whig-Standard*, editorial, Wednesday, April 11, 2001.

"Mass burnout has hit the profession with a national shortage of skilled teachers looming and a growing reticence among young people to enter a field so plagued with problems."

Sean Fine, *The Globe and Mail*, February 5, 2001.

"The spiraling demands of government initiatives, incessant record-keeping, education plans, targeting and inspections, have left teachers reeling. A working week of 50 hours is average. Many are doing 70. This is not only bad for teachers, it's harmful to children."

"It's time to limit the load," *Times Educational Supplement*, UK, editorial, April 13, 2001.

"The* Toronto Star *reported on March 10, 2000, that the Ontario Minister of Education announced the tightening of rules on official teaching time beyond what had been operationalized by school boards after the original legislation. The minister "also warned teachers to participate in extra-curricular activities or else they would be forced by law to do so."

C. Mallon, "Ontario teachers' battle looming: Classroom time crackdown could spark labour unrest," *The Toronto Star*, March 10, 2000.

The preceding quotes reflect polychotomous perspectives on teacher workload and stress. The first three reflect teachers' fatigue, demoralization, and burnout; the fourth implies that teacher workload is such an insignificant issue that teachers can be expected to do more teaching, as well as extra-curricular duties.

This report identifies and discusses data and analyses that have been reported in the international research, and in current educational publications, about teacher workload and related stress.

Workload issues have been a focus of concern for Canadian teachers and teacher unions during the last decade. The Canadian Teachers' Federation published the King and Peart (1992) study which found that:

> For some teachers the demands of teaching can be overwhelming. The workload has no well-defined limits; it is essentially open-ended. While contracts with boards appear to define expectations regarding teacher workload, contract terms represent minimum requirements. To respond to the needs of every student, teachers tend to do far more than is required and some try to do more than they can physically manage. (p. 182)

King and Peart also found that B.C. teachers reported higher stress levels than any other province's teachers, with 21% of respondents in B.C. reporting high stress levels compared to 11% in Prince Edward Island. B.C. teachers also reported lower job satisfaction than teachers in six other provinces. The BCTF survey "Teaching in the '90s" (Kuehn, 1993) found that the top five causes of stress were identified by teachers as: unmet needs of students, class composition, size of workload, attitudes of the provincial government, and the inclusion of students with special needs. A report by Tataryn et al (1998), which reported incidences of B.C. teacher disability lasting more than 20 days, found that the largest single category of disability was psychological disorders, at 36% of the total disability cases. The authors suggested that this was linked to stressful work environments.

A report by Gallen, Kalenzig, and Tamney for the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (1995b) explored the complexity and diversity of teachers' work, clearly linking workload and stress not only to the quantity of the hours worked, but also to the diverse nature and demands of teachers' work:

> Not only must teachers juggle diverse and frequently intense types of interactions with their students, they are also typically asked to respond to requests and demands placed on them by colleagues, administrators, parents, and other members of the community. (p. 40)

An editorial comment (March 29, 2001) in the *Vancouver Sun* reflects a typical media perspective on the additional expectations placed on schools. Under the title "When schools fail to act", the editorial states:

> It too often seems that in the school system that no one is ever seen to be blamed for anything. Bullies are seen to be victims of their own upbringing, and their victims – the real victims in our view – are sometimes forced to

> change schools because no one is willing or able to deal effectively with the culprits.... The goal is to avert tragedies and not merely to punish those responsible for them. This should not be too much to ask of the school system.

The *Sun*'s moralizing editorial ignores efforts undertaken to reduce bullying in schools. It makes assumptions about how all bullies are seen, and how they are dealt with, without ascertaining what systems actually exist in schools and without going to the effort of producing any evidence for its claims. It continues the veiled and implicit criticism that teachers and school staff really should be able to handle this and likely many other social issues. In terms of workload and stress, it also illustrates the gulf between media perceptions and teacher views. Media looks in from the outside and is critical of perceived shortcomings in the educational system, which media commentaries imply are essentially the fault of those who work in the system. This perspective implies that school work is easy work, and that more effort could and should be expended by educators. When media commentaries lack data or evidence to support a case, and rely instead on a populist stance, they offer nothing constructive to the debates on the issue at hand or to understanding workload issues. Indeed, they may exacerbate stress by their nonchalant but potentially cutting criticisms. Some media and at least one government (Ontario) share similar perspectives with regard to teacher workload, and press for more work from teachers in spite of considerable evidence that teachers' workloads are already excessive.

A quite different perspective is contained in data from many studies which reflect teacher fatigue and stress from high workload and diverse demands. These studies utilize extensive data collection, usually through surveys or by teachers recording their time use in diaries. There exists one difference of note between survey data collection and diary "time-use" data collection, which may explain the disparate amounts of time found by the use of the two approaches to data collection. When teachers estimate their time use, as compared to actually recording it, workload estimates appear consistently lower than time-use diaries reveal. This suggests that teachers appear to underestimate their own workload when they complete surveys.

John Malcolmson's (1999) elementary teacher workload study in three British Columbia urban school districts used teacher diaries to provide detailed records of time worked and how such time was distributed. His report showed that:

> Teachers' overall work day was close to double the time contained within the regular school day. It also confirms that teachers spend seven times the amount of time outside school planning and preparing their work as they do during the school day. It shows that teachers' lunch periods are being seriously eroded under the pressure of other work demands. (p. i)

A time-use study of Nova Scotia teachers (Time-Use Research Program, 2000) also used a time-use diary approach to data collection. They found that teachers recorded their work week at 52.5 hours, less than half of which was classroom instruction. The report discusses the "myriad of different, yet related, activities" that constitute teaching, and states:

> More than 80% of respondents indicated that they feel they are trying to take on too many things at once, and about 75% feel that others expect too much of

> them. Seventy-five percent said they worry about not spending enough time with family and friends. Obvious ramifications include feelings of guilt, resentment of job demands, and anxiety from the fear of not meeting expectations. (p. vi)

The geographic range of these reports shows that the issue crosses provincial boundaries and has been a consistent focus of attention for teacher unions across Canada for much of the last decade. But the Canadian interest has not been exclusive to unions. Teacher workload reports have also been published by Statistics Canada, with a national comparison of teachers' workloads conducted by Schembari (1994), and a study of Saskatchewan teachers' workload by Gallen, Karlenzig and Tamney (1995a). Schembari concluded that workload constituted one of a teacher's main sources of stress, that teacher workload had increased over the ten years 1982–1992, and that data showed B.C. teachers worked the longest hours, 2 hours above the national average. The study by Gallen et al (1995a) found an average 47-hour work week for teachers. The authors discussed teaching as a "multi-track activity", in which teachers were required to do several things at once, in responding to the needs of students or their interactions with colleagues. Such multi-track activities also led to role conflict, where teachers felt torn and pulled by the need to fill different roles:

> Counsellor, social worker, nurse, chauffeur, fund-raiser, mediator, public relations officer, entertainer … the list of roles that teachers are called upon to perform on behalf of their students, schools and communities, is lengthy and diverse. As all roles are important and teachers are constantly pressed for time, they must often make difficult choices about their priorities. For some teachers, these decisions result in an ongoing sense of role conflict. (Gallen et al, 1995b, p. 55)

Some reports identify high stress periods for many teachers during the school year. One such time is when report cards are written. The report by the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association (VESTA, 1997) used a survey to collect information from teachers concerning reporting practices and issues. The report stated that current reporting requirements resulted in high stress for a large proportion of Vancouver's elementary teachers:

> Nearly all categories of teachers, no matter how long they've been teaching or what their specific job role, are experiencing high stress with the current reporting practice. (p. 12)

Nine factors were identified by teachers as causes of stress during reporting times, the highest being the amount of time taken to write reports, a factor identified by 98% of respondents. While some efforts have been made by a number of districts to reduce the amount of time necessary to produce report cards, the mandated frequency of reporting, and the time required to complete reports, induces high stress levels for many teachers. The education system appears, therefore, to have what appear to be built-in stress-inducing requirements as a norm of its cycle. While reporting to parents is obviously required and necessary, very limited consideration appears to have been given to the effects on teacher workload of mandating three written reports a year. No time is allocated to teachers, there exists limited clerical support, and anecdotal formats, where used, often consume substantial

quotas of teacher time. While some districts have attempted to find solutions, such as developing software and formats for reporting, many teachers still identify reporting as a major source of stress.

International studies include those by Drago et al (1999) in the USA. Drago believes that teachers' work intensification mirrors a societal trend, which he terms "the overworked society." He argues that several factors contribute to a society being overworked. First, the preponderance of what he terms "dual-income families" has greatly increased pressure on women to manage work responsibilities and household tasks. 78% of all U.S. married employees are in what he calls "dual-income families." Perhaps such families might be more appropriately considered to be "dual-workload" families. Second, in order to be competitive in a global economy, "high commitment work systems" have become the norm:

> High commitment work systems involve increased levels of teamwork, training, meetings, and involvement in the job and decisions around the job, all of which increases demands on employees. (p. 32)

Drago argues that in response to inadequate funding, education systems have forced school districts to implement a form of high commitment work, systems which can be exacerbated even more by external factors such as urban poverty, or by imposed systems such as site-based management. Site-based management increases the non-teaching workload of both teachers and administrative officers by increasing their involvement in decision-making which is downloaded to the school site from the school district.

One example of how site-based management increases teacher workload, which has occurred in B.C., is the closing of a central store and distribution system for paper and other materials used in schools. When a district closes such a store, it ostensibly saves money in terms of facilities and wages. Each school might then be allocated an amount of money for the purchase of materials. As a result, teachers from each school now have to find suppliers, check prices, and purchase paper and materials, rather than simply completing an existing order form for ordering and delivery of supplies from the central store, thereby adding to their workload. When tasks such as these are added to hundreds of schools, workload is increased in all of those schools. This exemplifies one negative aspect of high commitment work, which essentially involves the downloading of responsibility to save system costs without acknowledging either the costs incurred to those who do the work, or the lost economies of scale through bulk and centralized purchasing. Such systems take a narrow managerial view of reducing costs and ignore concepts such as cost-benefit analysis, which might include a wider consideration of the true costs of high commitment work systems. Such costs include the increased time and stress of teachers who have one more job added to their work.

Reporting the average hours worked by teachers, Drago stated:

> Considering all time either at school or performing work-related tasks, even if performed simultaneously with others, yielded and average of approximately ten and a quarter hours per day of work invasiveness. (p. 38)

Drago's contribution is useful in that he links teachers' work to societal trends. He provides evidence that the nature of work and society has changed, and that education has mirrored commercial demands to "do more with less", placing higher expectations and higher stress on employees. He also reminds us that work intensification and stress are a factor in many workers' lives, and that teachers are not unique in stress and workload issues.

A study by Dinham and Scott (2000) identified factors which caused teacher dissatisfaction in Australian schools:

> Systemic changes to staffing ratios, promotions procedures, changes to school responsibilities and management, were all found to be dissatisfying, particularly given the pace of change at the time. Implicit in many of the public pronouncements about educational change was that schools and teachers were in need of 'reform' from outside, and were either incapable of either seeing the need for change or managing it themselves. (p. 5)

Dinham also identified specific teacher concerns with workload, and found that existing workloads impacted family life:

> The major concern for both teachers and their partners centred on workload. Virtually all underestimated this and note its increase in recent times. Executive teachers found their increasing administrative workload problematic, as did their partners when this spilled over into and detracted from family life. (p. 7)

The UK *Times Educational Supplement* (TES) has frequently featured issues on increased teacher workload and stress among British teachers, particularly in England and Wales. The most recent study reported in the May 25, 2001 issue (p. 4) found a 51-hour work week for elementary teachers and a 53-hour work week for secondary teachers, with hours recently increased because of new large-scale testing of students. The article states that both school administrators and teacher unions agree that the more that schools are expected to demonstrate progress, the heavier the workload demands become on teachers and administrators.

The TES has reported a number of teacher suicides directly related to anxiety over workloads and school inspection (Bunting, 2000). One teacher wrote the following note before she drowned herself in a river:

> I am now finding the stress of my job too much. The pace of work and the long days are more than I can do. I would like my ashes to be scattered in the woods. (p. 23)

Another 33-year-old teacher hanged herself "after becoming terrified of getting a bad inspectors' report", while another teacher simply left the message, "My best is not good enough," before ending his life. While these may be extreme examples, they illustrate the immense pain caused to some teachers by high stress and what they saw to be an unfeeling accountability system. The same article provides data from a major UK insurance company that states that teachers were the most depressed category of workers, with 44% of their

disability insurance claims caused by mental problems, compared to 25% from other groups of workers.

The level of stress and depression among English and Welsh teachers has finally become a focus for government and employers as record shortages of teachers and problems with recruitment and retention are being reported across the country, with the shortages being linked to increased workload and stress by the government's School Teachers' Review Body:

> Workloads are clearly an important adverse influence on morale, and on recruitment and retention. (School Teachers' Review Body, quoted in TES, February 9, 2001).

In another report (September 8, 2000), the TES described a record legal settlement (approximately $550,000 CDN) to a teacher for breakdowns caused by an excessive workload in which a teacher taught a class of 28 students, 11 of whom had special needs. Both of these reports discussed systemic failure to recognize excessive workload and stress. In the teacher-breakdown case, the teacher, who had 24 years experience, had one minor breakdown, resulting in her taking leave; when she returned to work, she was faced with the same class and workload, which precipitated a severe psychological collapse and her eventual successful legal action. This suggests either the inability or the unwillingness of one employer to take appropriate action to reduce workload when a teacher's health is at risk.

A later TES article (Lowe, 2001) warns that an employer:

> ... must be certain that the teacher is fit for his or her duties before being allowed back. The teacher's doctor ... may suggest that the teacher can return if a lighter workload is provided. But while it may be possible to reduce the time a teacher is in school, it is not easy to keep the pressure down. If a school or governing body can foresee that a teacher may be exposed to more stress when s/he returns to school, and does not take reasonable and effective measures to combat it, they may be open to a claim for damages. (p. 16)

The UK experience reflects a system where an unacceptable number of teachers appear to have experienced low morale, high stress, disability, and depression, largely attributable to work environment and workload:

> A survey ... in May, 2000, revealed that 200,000 teachers – more than 2 in 5 in the profession in England and Wales – had experienced major stress, mainly due to workload, in the last two years. (Bunting, 2000, p. 23)

Imposed and centralized system accountability, a lack of professional autonomy, relentlessly imposed change, constant media criticism of public education systems, reduced resources and moderate pay, have all been associated with teacher stress in the UK. The fact that some or all of this combination of factors cause high stress to teachers is obvious enough from the available data. The startling point is that such lessons have routinely been ignored both by governments and by many employers until severe recruitment and retention crises occur, or until legal liability costs become a significant issue. Ignoring such evidence provides startling evidence of systemic inertia, with governments and employers ignoring huge individual and

systemic costs and failing to address the root causes of the crisis affecting teachers and a national educational system.

Do Canadian jurisdictions need to wait for a similar crisis before they address teacher workload issues? From all the available evidence, the answer may be "yes". The province of Ontario appears keen to replicate the English experience, with its constant confrontational stances and explicit demands for increased work and compliance with narrow accountability measures, all factors which have proven disastrous in producing high stress levels among teachers in England and Wales. Elsewhere, the lack of focus on teacher workload and stress suggests that provincial systems appear unwilling to address such issues, perhaps fearful of increasing costs by any recognition that too much is being asked of teachers. At the same time, many provinces have increased system-accountability demands, another factor clearly linked to increasing workload and stress in the UK.

There is an important gender issue identified in the literature on teacher workload and stress. A number of studies have documented the difference between genders in how time is used. Generally, research shows that men spend more time on employment-related activities, but women spend more time than men on domestic work. Men also spend twice as much time as women on sports and hobbies.

Recent research has identified workload and stress as an issue with particular significance for women:

> The very nature of women's work provides opportunity for both the development of psychological stressors and the non-recognition of their consequences. (Lippel, 1999, p. 80)

Lippel discusses the "double workload" issue, where she refers to the Armstrong and Armstrong (1994) study in stating that:

> Women most often bear the brunt of responsibility related to the home and rearing of children. (p. 80)

New data from the study by Michelson and Harvey (2000) supports the view that women spend more time on domestic activities than do men:

> Aggregating the amount of daily time given to domestic work, care-giving and shopping, the female teachers exceed the men by 168-108 minutes (a week).

One dimension of caregiving relates not only to children but also to caring for aging parents. With about half of B.C.'s teachers aged 45 or older and 66%[1] female, it is likely that a significant number of teachers are caregivers to children and to an aging parent or parents. It might be expected, based on analyses of the existing literature, that most of these caregivers will be women. For those who are the single caregiver, they may experience considerable dual or multiple care-giving responsibilities in addition to paid employment. Dorrell (2000) reflected that:

[1] Ministry of Education Standard Report 2052, *Headcount of full-time and part-time educators by gender within school district*, January, 2001.

> As a society we expect a parent to take leave to care for a dependent when that dependent is a newborn. The government even stipulates the terms of the benefit and picks up the tab. But when it comes to caring for a dying, ill or simply aging dependent, employees often have only their family circle to turn to for support. (p. 19)

The federal government's Human Resources Development Canada (2000) also discussed the issue of elder care:

> Elder care can be relatively time-consuming, particularly when compared with child care responsibilities, as is the case for many people belonging to the "sandwich generation." Caregivers – primarily women – can often be torn between the demands of their job and the ability to provide quality care for their relative.

The Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) report shares information about collective agreements that provide short- and long-term leave arrangements for those employees who are caring for an elderly parent or parents.

Lippell (1999) refers to a 1989 study by Lowe which states that it is important to examine the workplace as a source of stress, rather than make any assumptions concerning home factors and environment as primary stressors:

> The difficulties generated by the existence of this double workload may contribute or be perceived to have caused psychological disability, and it is easier for decision-makers to assume that home stressors are the source of disability rather than to examine the work situation. This is true despite the fact that research has clearly shown workplace stressors to be pivotal to working women's mental health. (p. 80)

Lippell (1999) also produces evidence that when men and women complain of chronic stress, male claims in a range of tribunals and courts "fared significantly better" than did those of women. When men brought claims, Lippel argues, their examples of unusual stressful situations were more likely to be accepted than were those of women.

An additional cause of workload stress, which impacts more women than men, appears to be the covert violence perpetrated by colleagues (administrators and teachers) and identified by Lyon and Douglas (1999). They provided evidence both of the damaging effects on individuals, and costs to the system, that stemmed from such violence, which they identified as often being in the form of sexual harassment:

> Proportionately, work was most often missed because of covert violence perpetrated by colleagues, rather than more overt forms of violence committed by students. Work missed was also related to decreased satisfaction with the resolution of the incident, and lack of action taken in response to the incident. (p. 7)

Lippel and Demers (1998) also argued that the courts, too, have contributed to limiting women's success in accessing compensation in situations where sexual harassment has occurred:

> On June 20, 1996, the Supreme Court of Canada handed down a decision in Beliveau St.-Jacques ... that has the potential to significantly undermine the access to justice of working women who are victims of sexual harassment. A majority of the court held that an employee who suffered sexual harassment in the workplace could not bring an action for compensatory and exemplary damages under Section 49 of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. (p. 1)

The data and analyses from Lippel and other studies reflect disturbing evidence which shows that women are more at risk than men when workload or other work-related factors leads to stress. They are also likely to be less recognized as being stressed than are their male colleagues in tribunals, and have limited success in gaining compensation for sexual harassment. The data also suggest that there is little evidence of improvement in reducing stress for women over time, likely because of what Lippel believes to be systemic discrimination against them.

Michelson and Harvey (2000) concluded that women teachers have higher stress levels than do male teachers, with higher stress reported for women in areas of "time crunch" and pressure. Although their report focuses on recent changes in the Ontario education system, their warning about adding extra loads to teachers' work might be considered in any jurisdiction:

> Reforms that put additional classes and students into a teacher's school day and remove preparation time create disproportionate increases in the work that will have to be done at home and outside normal working hours. For many teachers, this is like pouring water into an already full cup, particularly if, as is likely, they are women.... The old saying, "Man may work from sun to sun, but woman's work is never done" extends unfortunately well to the context of teaching and the lives of teachers, not least in view of the gender of so many teachers. (p. 13)

With women representing two-thirds of the total number of teachers, analyses which suggests higher stress levels in women teachers, and systemic discrimination against them, should be of concern to teachers and their unions. The issue of gender, in the context of teacher workload and stress, should also be considered by employers and governments. Stress can affect any teacher, but gender differences appear to be a significant dimension in the literature on teacher workload and stress.

Conclusion

Scott, Stone, and Dinham (2000) discussed the work of Bourdieu (1998). Bourdieu has described changes to the state in many western societies, in which he discusses the "right hand" of governments, and their administrative departments such as Treasury Boards, which have driven reforms of the last twenty years. He considered the "left hand" of government to include those people who work in the "caring professions", including teaching:

> Bourdieu contends that the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing, and certainly does not want to pay for its activities. Social service agencies of all sorts are thus faced with the demand to do more with less. The antipathy of the right hand to the left is also graphically illustrated in the status of those professions that perform the work of the left. (p. 2)

If the literature describes the increased alienation between the "left" and "right" hands of the state, with a negative impact on teachers' and other public sector employees' workload, it also describes an altruistic, highly-motivated commitment by teachers to offer much more than the minimum required. The literature therefore states that teaching has become an overworked profession, while teachers are individually motivated to do more than the minimum required. Somewhere between these concepts lies a balance, with hard-working, motivated teachers finding satisfaction from the vocation of teaching within a manageable workload. But the balance has shifted to a degree that is unhealthy for teachers and for public education systems. However, it is possible to argue that there now exists a tentative state recognition that the balance has shifted too far, particularly in the UK, and is negatively impacting recruitment and retention.

Much of the available research on teacher workload and stress states that teacher workloads are excessive, and that the negative effects of stress are having considerable impact on teachers. The effects include declining job satisfaction, reduced ability to meet students' needs, significant incidences of psychological disorders leading to increased absence from work, and a high proportion of claims for disability caused by stress. Stress also appears to be a factor in teachers leaving the profession in a number of countries, and is impacting internationally on recruitment. There may be more serious consequences for women teachers in terms of work-induced stress than have been widely discussed, and there exists some evidence of systemic discrimination against women in terms of adjudicating disability claims. For a profession that is about two-thirds female, these data are disturbing, and might lead to a sharper focus on gender by teacher unions, employers, and governments in addressing workload issues.

At the same time that this body of evidence suggests a serious problem, a series of media articles or governments' announcements state or imply that teachers "have it easy" and could be expected to do much more. It would appear that a sizeable body of media fails to conduct even the most basic data collection, or to access published research, before deciding its views, few of which are empathic to teachers in terms of workload issues.

Ironically, most elected officials who believe that teachers should do more, spend far fewer hours in legislatures than teachers do in schools. Governments have consistently ignored a wide range of data which tells them that teachers' stress caused by workload is a crisis

requiring action, and likely will continue to be until the crisis in recruitment and retention becomes clear even to them.

For teachers to address the issues of workload, the most obvious route is through the collective bargaining process. But there are other options, such as increased attention to health and safety issues and practices, perhaps involving external agencies such as the Workers' Compensation Board. Employers, too, have an interest in reducing stress-related illness or leave, and in reducing what Lyon and Douglas (1999) estimated to be a minimum cost of $1.87 million per year to the B.C. school system from violence-related incidents alone.

Evidence from the UK, while indicating alarming levels of systemic inertia, also indicates that action can be taken once the effects of stress-inducing workloads are understood. Slater (2001) discussed a report of the UK School Teachers' Review Body, reported in Times Educational Supplement, February 9, 2001, and stated:

> The easing of (teacher) workload pressures continues to be a priority, despite efforts at all levels to reduce administrative tasks and paperwork. (p. 22)

However effective a union's efforts to address workload and stress issues, there is an urgent need for collaboration among unions, employers, and governments to address teacher workload and stress issues in the K-12 education system. A pragmatic and collaborative focus on workload and stress factors might then lead to solutions which make teachers' work more manageable, and the education system more productive. This should result in fewer teachers burned out to the degree that they take short-term absences, long-term leaves, or permanently leave their work because of unmanageable workload or stress.

Research which describes overworked societies suggests that the problem is endemic across jobs, professions, and countries. But "high commitment work" hardly appears to fit with the concept of building healthy public education systems which depend on the capacity of teachers to work effectively. And, as suggested in the Times Educational Supplement editorial quoted at the start of this paper, overworked and stressed teachers can become harmful to students and negatively impact student learning.

Should this paper be considered narrowly focused on teachers' work, a startling reminder of the costs of stress disorders to business and society was recently provided by the Business and Economic Roundtable on Mental Health. A report authored by Wilson, Joffe, Wilkerton and Bastable (2000) stated that:

- 1.4 million Canadian workers (10% of the total) suffer from depression.
- Depression costs the United States and Canada $60 billion US per year.
- The incidence of depression is growing and is affecting more younger workers.
- Stress is increasing and change is continuing to intensify.
- Depression and stress disorders at work are driving disability rates, and represent more than 30% of all disability recorded at three of Canada's best-known corporations.
- The incidence of improper treatment produces an army of "walking wounded" employees — partly disabled and increasingly unproductive.

- Over the past decade, labour productivity and hours worked by employees have collapsed into a terrific imbalance. Canadians are working longer and harder, but not more productively.

The authors include the Vice-Chairman of RBC Dominion Securities (Wilson), the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster University (Joffe), and the CEO of Royal Le Page (Bastable). The report is one of "a series of commentaries, essays, interviews and analyses of mental health for distribution among corporations in the global business community." The findings of this report reinforce the notion of an overworked society, increasingly unproductive, and incurring huge costs because of its inability to address workload and stress issues. That the report emanates from the bastion of corporate Canada clearly shows that workload is not just a "worker's issue" promoted by unions to promote members' self-interest. It seriously affects employers' profits and competitive capacity. Recognizing that excessive workload negatively impacts individuals and employers, while incurring huge costs to society, should assist efforts to generate understanding of workload, stress, and productivity issues that affect all Canadians.

In spite of the argument made above, endemic work-related stress may mean that general public sympathy for teachers' workload-induced stress is limited in the near future. However, issues of teacher workload and stress must be addressed for the sake of those who work as teachers, and for the well-being of the system as a whole. The recent success of Scottish teachers in obtaining a 35-hour working week reflects a progressive, proactive initiative by one government to address and reduce teacher workload and stress levels. Emulation of the Scottish example appears unlikely to occur in Canadian jurisdictions if left to the choice of government and employers. While constructive engagement with governments and employers may lead to some positive initiatives, the evidence to date suggests that reducing workload through collective bargaining and union-sponsored health and safety initiatives appear to be more promising options for teacher unions.

In the longer term, teacher and other unions might consider engaging in a cross-sectoral dialogue with both employers and governments on how to improve productivity and reduce stress-induced costs caused by excessive workload. In a *Vancouver Sun* article of June 16, 2001, Bruce O'Hara provided excerpts from an article which will be published in an upcoming book, *Memos to the Prime Minister: What Canada could be in the 21st Century* (to be published by John Wiley and Sons). O'Hara argues that governments might restructure tax and benefit structures to encourage shorter hours in the work week, thereby increasing productivity and expanding employment. Currently, Canadian tax and benefit structures encourage long hours and fewer employees because employers pay more tax and benefit costs for any additional employee, rather than costs being based on the hours worked. Changed tax and benefit structures would offer incentives to employers. Ideally, such incentives would reduce individual workload by increasing employment while keeping costs to employers neutral. Societal benefits might also include substantially reduced spending for unemployment and in health-related areas, as a shorter working week produces fuller employment, and a healthier and more productive workforce.

O'Hara's ideas essentially require a progressive and consultative process led by government. While several European governments have initiated such processes, the evidence suggests that workload in Canada is increasing, with huge individual, economic, and social costs. It is

surely time to address this systemic failure by finding ways to reduce individual workload. Perhaps teachers and their unions might lead the way, not to be an exception to the workload endured by many Canadians, but by being among the first to seek redress in finding ways to reduce workload that can benefit all those who overwork in our country.

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